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Goverance of the
Montana University System:
An Historical Perspective

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Governance of the Montana University System:
An Historical Perspective

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PREFACE

Throughout its history the Montana University System has been buffeted by the opposing forces of reform and political expediency. Alternately it has been impelled toward centralization by the need for efficiency, coherence and accountability, and pushed back toward chaotic decentralization by the pursuit of local interests in the state political arena.

Rick Farrant's study provides a succinct historical overview which may enable some readers to assess present and future controversies that surround the question, "who governs"?

Lawrence K. Pettit
Commissioner of Higher Education

July, 1976



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I. INTRODUCTION

The controversy surrounding fiscal affairs and authority patterns of the Montana University System has roots that go back sometime around the turn of the century following the formation of four state-supported institutions -- Montana State College at Bozeman (1893), Montana State University at Missoula (1895), State Normal College at Dillon (1897), and Montana School of Mines at Butte (1900).

The intent for constructing four geographically separated institutions was sound because the government -- and the people -- were concerned with providing maximum accessibility for those wishing to receive a college education. Not long after the cornerstones were laid, however, many regarded it as a mistake. Montana State University (Missoula) President Dr. C.A. Duniway, a graduate of Harvard, best illustrated the changing sentiment in June 1912 when he wrote:¹

Nothing has been more impressive than the defects in the system of divided institutions and their government in Montana. That higher educational resources are divided among four institutions, widely separated from each other, is well known. That this division produces weakness of rivalry and waste of duplication, without real compensating advantages of separation, is recognized by many thoughtful men. Encouraged by such men, including many prominent in public life and several of this State Board, I undertook a public discussion of this situation to see whether Montana would repair her great educational mistake before institutions were highly developed. No practical response was made by educational authorities or by the legislature. Instead a measure was enacted into law introducing a more complicated system, giving final authority through financial control over higher education to a board of three political officers, not one of whom need be, or is likely to be, nominated or elected by reason of any special qualification to be an educational trustee. This subject is not presented as a matter involving personalities, but as a question of system and of educational principal. Consolidation or even administrative unification of Montana's higher institutions seems to be a dream, not to be realized because of the strength of forces of localism.

Open support for a unified system of higher education grew despite some unsuccessful attempts to smother the idea. John H. Durston, Editor of the

¹ Chancellor's Files, 1916

Anaconda Standard, was one of the major forces behind a campaign to reorganize the system under a Chancellor.

There were, naturally, doubters of the proposed reorganization. Some believed central authority would hinder rather than improve the efficiency of higher education in Montana. Others, for purely selfish reasons, believed central control would promote favoritism by the Chancellor for certain campuses. In any event, the 1913 legislature approved a chancellorship plan for the system and additionally agreed that the four institutions be called "The University of Montana". The Chancellor was to serve at the pleasure of the State Board of Education and generally be responsible for promoting coordination among the four units.

Sixty-three years have passed since that piece of legislation in 1913 -- sixty-three years of financial crisis, inter-institutional bickering, and political indecision. The result: three major studies on organization of the system (1944-1958-1973), five Chancellors serving a total of 21 years, a number of executive secretaries serving roughly 30 years, a Commissioner of Higher Education serving three years, and eight years in which there was no executive head for the system.

In another era of controversy concerning higher education, it is certainly fitting to take a careful look at the future in Montana by reflecting upon a historical perspective of central authority in the Montana University System. A dream that was made reality in 1913 should not be forgotten.

II. THE FIRST CHANCELLOR

The system proposed by the 1913 Montana legislature was unique. Many asserted that it was the first administrative structure of its type in the United States. Written memos dating back to 1922 indicate that states including Georgia, North Carolina and Oregon followed, with varying success, the arrangement set by the Montana legislature.

The first Chancellor was Dr. Edward C. Elliott who took the "pioneer" post after resigning as Dean of the College of Education at the University of Wisconsin. In his inaugural address in 1916, Chancellor Elliott enthusiastically laid the foundation for a bright future for Montana Higher Education.²

From an external and mechanical point of view, the administrative unification of the institutions, now comprising the University of Montana, presents many new educational problems and difficulties. My first four months of experience have fully demonstrated this to me. Yet the wholehearted cooperation exhibited by all of those concerned with each of the colleges and schools has afforded a real and rare encouragement for the successful attainment of institutional harmony, educational unity and financial economy.

There is not to be found in any American state a scheme of organization and government similar to that devised by the legislature of 1913 for the University of Montana. Up to that time, each of our four institutions of higher education while under the general oversight of the state board of education were, in reality, disconnected; and for the most part, autonomous. Each served the state according to its own rights.

Under the new scheme, these separated institutions became component parts of a single organization each retaining its own identity. The chancellorship of the university was designed as the connecting mechanism for the harmonizing of effort, the unifying of aims and the articulating of activities of the several colleges and schools. Exercising such powers as might be delegated to him by the state board of education, it was contemplated that the chancellor would so adjust and coordinate the state's higher educational resources as to avoid unnecessary and unwise duplication and to eliminate all unwholesome and destructive competition. Such adjustment and coordination are demanded, in order that people of this state may succeed to a maximum of educational advantages, with a minimum of wastage of public funds.

For the next six years, Montana higher education prospered under a system not unlike the present system. Some of the ideas proposed and projects undertaken parallel those being considered today. The quest

² Inter-Montana Educator, 1916, Volume Twelve, No. 1

for elimination of unnecessary duplication was evident in 1916 -- although not as encompassing as the present program review. Elliott hired a consultant to implement a uniform accounting system for a fee of \$800 -- compared to our present uniform accounting effort which has cost almost \$200,000. Also, Elliott employed a publicity assistant to help coordinate publications efforts in the University of Montana.

There is also a similarity between the defined roles and responsibilities of the Chancellor between 1916-1922 and the Commissioner of Higher Education in 1976, although the pioneer Chancellor system was somewhat more centralized. In an administrative memorandum dated June 29, 1918, Elliott outlined the regulations regarding appointments, promotions, and compensation. According to that memo, the Chancellor, who was appointed by the State Board of Education, appointed deans of professional schools and colleges, directors and superintendents of stations, services and laboratories, and administrative divisions. He also had the prerogative to suggest termination of their contracts. Generally, the only institutional personnel who were not appointed by the Chancellor were clerical, janitorial, and residence hall positions. Appointments and salary schedules for institutional positions were subject to the approval of the State Board of Education following the acceptance by the Chancellor.

Under the present system, appointments of administrators are subject to the recommendation of the Commissioner of Higher Education, as are the salaries of all contract personnel.

The specific role and relationship of the Chancellor to the University and the State Board of Education in 1918 follows:³

³ Chancellor's Files, 1916-18. Only the most important material is cited.

I. Relation of the Chancellor to the State Board of Education.

The Chancellor is the chief executive officer of the University and as such performs the duties prescribed by law, and carries out the orders of the Board. He is responsible to the Board for the prompt and effective execution of all policies determined upon for the proper enforcement of the rules and regulations adopted for the several institutions in the University. He shall act as the medium of communication between the Board and the officers and organization of the University. He shall attend and participate in all meetings of the Board at which matters relating to his office, or to any of the institutions and affairs of the University are under consideration. He shall make nominations and reports of appointments, promotions, salaries, transfers, suspensions, dismissals, and resignations of administrative officers, members of instructional and scientific staffs, and other employees of the several institutions of the University. As prescribed by law, he shall sign all diplomas, degrees, papers, instruments, and documents executed by the University. It is also his duty to report to the Board at reasonable intervals, on the general condition of the University and to make recommendations concerning general policies that will promote the development of the higher educational system of the State."

The Board further stated:

The Chancellor shall prepare and submit to the Board such annual and special reports concerning the University as the Board may require. He shall also prepare and present annually to the Board, the University budget. When approved by the Board, this budget shall govern all expenditures, subject to the provisions of the law and to the regulations of the State Board of Examiners.

"As the Chief Executive Officer of the University, the Chancellor is especially charged with the duty of securing harmony and cooperation among the institutions of the University, and the economical coordination of their instructional and scientific work. To these ends he has such powers as may be definitely delegated to him by the Board; and in addition such incidental powers as are necessary to properly perform the duties of his office.

Comparatively, the duties of the 1976 Commissioner of Higher Education as prescribed by the Montana Board of Regents follows (passages similar to those as drafted in 1918 are underlined):⁴

⁴ Board of Regents Policy Book, 1976

1. Execute and administer the policies, decisions and rules of the Board of Regents. The Commissioner has broad delegated authority as executive officer of the Board of Regents and chief administrator of the University System to secure implementation of Board Policy and to establish administrative regulations and policy essential to the proper governance of the system.
2. Exercise control, consonant with general Board Policies, over interunit matters, including those pertaining to budgets, curriculum, research and extension activities. It is the intent of this provision that each unit president act as chief executive officer of his unit, subject to provisions of the law and policies of the Board, but that the Commissioner control inter-unit matters in the interests of providing a unified and integrated university system . . .
3. Advise the Board concerning the selection and removal of unit presidents.
4. Prepare for the Board a suggested allocation of state appropriations to the units of the University System. This suggested allocation shall be accompanied by a statement of the basis on which it is to be determined. Budget requests approved by the Board shall be presented to the Governor and to the legislature by the Commissioner.
5. Sign, on behalf of the Board, contracts and documents which have been approved or awarded by the Board.
6. Prepare and submit to the Board such annual and special reports as the Board may require, and see that periodic internal audits of the several campuses are conducted.
7. Act as medium through which all matters shall be presented to the Board and to committees of the Board, including reports, recommendations and suggestions from units, their faculty members, employees, students and agents of the executive and legislative branches of state government.
8. Act as the medium for submission by unit presidents of requests for opinions from the Attorney General. (Elliott may have done this although it was not included in the Board of Education's guidelines.)
9. Act as the official representative of the Board of the system to the Legislature and its committees.
10. Act as a medium through which policies of the Board shall be announced. The presidents of the units shall not make any announcements of the Board's policies until authorized to do so by the Commissioner.

In essence, the major difference from the first Chancellor system and the system in effect today was the power of the Chancellor to have a hand in hiring and firing of the majority of institutional personnel, although under both systems the governing board had made the final decision.

There were, naturally, problems of financing and coordination with the first Chancellor system. But, when Elliott resigned in 1922 to take the presidential post at Purdue University in Indiana, most seemed to feel that the "experiment" had been a success. This can be discerned through excerpts of newspaper accounts following Elliott's resignation:

BUTTE POST⁵

. . . In most instances the recent newspaper comment includes reference to the fact that the reorganization of the state's schools of collegiate grade into a real university, with unity in management and administration, was the right thing to do. At first a good many citizens whose judgment with respect to that policy merited and received respectful consideration were of the opinion that the undertaking was unwise.

"There is no doubt that many of these citizens have revised their views, and that they share the belief that the policy which went into effect when Dr. Elliott came to Montana is, after all, the best that could have been adopted. Of itself this change of opinion is due chiefly to the fact that the chancellor has been successful in very large measure in solving a novel and intricate problem relating to university administration."

RED LODGE PICKET-JOURNAL⁶

"Six years of operation have demonstrated the feasibility of Montana's unique chancellor plan of directing its collegiate institutions. For years previous to the inauguration of this novel scheme the colleges of Montana had been used as political footballs and their true development had been hampered by the strife and lack of harmony which led to various attempts at consolidation and relocation. . .

⁵ University of Montana Bulletin, July 1922 Vol. IV, Number 3

⁶ Ibid

Dr. Elliott has completed his sixth year in the position, has succeeded admirably in attaining the ends promised by the new plan, and has won the respect and support of the people of the state to a degree never dreamed of during the years of warfare which preceded the adoption of this new plan.

BOZEMAN CHRONICLE⁷

"It was no easy task that Chancellor Elliott faced when he took hold of the higher education system of Montana. In the years that have passed he has done great work. Today he has the institutions working together in the greatest harmony and all the old bitterness has disappeared.

The State Board of Education was also pleased with the results of the new system and Elliott's efforts. It seemed when they passed a resolution on July 7, 1922 concerning Elliott's resignation and record of achievement, that a sound future of Montana higher education was assured. In retrospect, the six years between 1916 and 1922 may very well be the only years in which the chancellorship system of higher education was thoroughly effective. It was the last time that a large majority of public sentiment favored the centralized system. It was, perhaps, the last time that the efforts of a Chancellor received complete respect and attention by the State Board of Education.

During these six years, the state experienced a drought and a world war. Subsequently, the system was forced to solve the problem of post-war increased institutional enrollment -- a problem that Montana higher education would have to contend with during the next 50 years, even during non-war times.

One of the major accomplishments during those initial years of the coordinated system was the establishment of a one and one-half mill levy every ten years to aid in the support of state higher educational institutions.

⁷ Ibid

That, coupled with a bond proposal, significantly reduced the financial burden experienced by the four institutions. At present, the Montana University System seeks support of a six-mill levy every ten years.

It is impossible to determine what the factors were for the overwhelming acceptance of the chancellorship system between 1916 and 1922. Perhaps it was the "newness" of the structure. Or, more likely, it was the state's thirst for better organization that kept a tone of optimism alive. There is no question, however, that Elliott was certain the chancellorship would thrive beyond his tenure. In his letter of resignation to Governor Joseph M. Dixon on May 12, 1922, Elliott wrote:⁸

I am firm in my faith that the University of Montana of the future will be developed upon the foundation of unity of purpose, harmony of action, and economy of operation which now characterizes the several constituent University institutions.

II. BEGINNING OF THE END

The period between 1916 and 1922 is generally regarded as the heyday of the chancellorship system in Montana higher education. The period between 1923 and 1933 could be construed as the "decline and fall" of the centralized system.

Many factors contributed to the demise of the chancellorship system. Essentially, it can be attributed to unfortunate economic and political conditions. The intense struggle in Montana for two sites for institutions played an important role in the public's faith in centralized control. That, coupled with the severe depression in the early 1930's, forced institutions into more than mere financial retrenchment -- they also had a propensity to "run scared" in the midst of the political upheaval surrounding the

⁸ Board of Education Minutes, July 1922, Page 924

location of the new campuses.

Dr. Melvin A. Brannon, president of the University of Idaho, was named as a successor to Chancellor Elliott in 1922. Brannon, throughout his employment, was generally well-liked by all four (subsequently six) institutions and carried out many of the intentions originally set forth by the 1913 State Board of Education and the Montana legislature. But there is little question that he faced, perhaps, the most difficult times of any Chancellor in the history of Montana higher education.

One of the interpretations of Brannon's early struggles in the position comes from a doctoral thesis prepared by Lincoln J. Aikens in 1958 at Montana State College in Bozeman. He writes:⁹

. . . as the years passed, and more and more tensions developed -- especially during the struggle over the establishment of Eastern Montana State Normal School and Northern Montana College -- Dr. Brannon was more and more subjected to criticism, much of it unfair, but nevertheless disconcerting. Undoubtedly this long struggle, with all of the strong feelings aroused pro and con, the maneuvering for position, the use of political expediency and other factors involved contributed to the adverse criticism.

Accounts in the Board of Education minutes indicate that nearly one dozen sites were considered before the establishment of the Normal School at Eastern in 1927. A strong group of concerned persons pushed the development of an institution at Eastern, feeling that supplemental rural education was needed in addition to the teacher training efforts at the Dillon school.

Development of a school at Havre followed in 1929, but the origins for its birth are somewhat sketchy. Some argued that the northern part of the state was too far away from the other institutions and an additional school was needed to ensure accessibility for Montanans.

⁹ Aikens, Lincoln J., 1958, Doctoral Thesis, Montana State

It appears, however, that Brannon's major problem with his administration concerned finances -- and no wonder. When the depression began clutching at the pocket books throughout Montana, higher education was forced to retrench. Exemplifying this bleak period were salary cuts taken at all institutions. Between 1931 and 1934, salaries at the six institutions -- already considered too low by many -- and in the Chancellor's office were slashed almost uniformly by 20 percent.

The retrenchment in the early thirties was further compounded by prior legislative action which significantly reduced appropriation requests made by the Board of Education. In 1925, for example, the legislature trimmed 28.9 percent from the University of Montana's 1925-26 budget request of \$2.2 million. Brannon openly attacked the legislature's unwillingness to meet budget needs when he said in 1927:¹⁰

In view of the importance of this legislation (he was talking about the 1913 legislation) and the high statesmanship achieved in that legislation it has seemed difficult to understand the perennial attacks made by certain members in succeeding legislatures upon this one high exhibit of Montana's Legislative branch in an act which has equal importance with Constitutional provisions for stabilizing and continuing executive and judicial service within the state.

It is interesting to note that, throughout Brannon's reign, the intent initially developed by the 1913 legislature and Board of Education was followed. In addition, the role of the Chancellor remained essentially the same. Brannon was expected to "coordinate the several units of the University of Montana", plan a course of development, oversee the building programs, develop curricula, make sundry reports and recommendations to the Board of Education, make final decision on appointments, authorize travel,

¹⁰ Chancellor's files, 1932

check monthly payrolls, award scholarships and hear appeals from campus employees. As the executive officer of the Board of Education, Brannon was also the University of Montana's liaison with most state agencies and the legislature.

As late as 1932, Brannon remained optimistic about the future of Montana higher education even in light of the recent years of struggle. In a February 27, 1932 article in School and Society he wrote:¹¹

The discussion of the Montana administration of higher education on separated campuses has been presented with no thought that it has achieved the measure of success desired by its creators or present administrators, or that it would prove a success in every state now operating higher education in two or more separated institutions. The record of fifteen years does show, however, that it has justified itself in Montana because it has made possible unified, efficient, cooperative and steadily improved higher educational services; it has permitted educational experts to eliminate unnecessary duplications in curricula, it has made possible the training of students for intelligent and friendly participation in public service. . . . The system is being steadily improved and strengthened and has the enthusiastic approval of all informed and intelligent leaders in the state.

One year after Brannon's enthusiastic comment on Montana Higher Education, a bill abolishing the chancellorship system was introduced into Senate by Senator Garber and passed both houses of the legislature, before being vetoed by the Governor. The veto was similar to one imposed in 1915 by Governor S.V. Stewart when the legislature had also tried to abolish the fledgling structure. Brannon, who resigned February 3, 1933, felt his resignation was a factor in saving the system as he implied in a letter to Dr. Calvin Crumbaker at the University of Oregon in Eugene:¹²

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid, 1933

You perhaps do not know that the last legislature, following the example of every legislature since the adoption of the unified system of administrative control in 1913, endeavored to repeal the Act and do away entirely with the Office of Chancellor. I became convinced that this effort could be defeated only in event I offered my resignation. I am glad to advise that we did succeed in saving the system and I think my resignation had very definite and beneficial effect in securing the Governor's veto of the repeal measure and the support of his veto given by the Senate.

Even though the centralized structure was saved, the legislature failed to appropriate any money for the position of chancellor for at least the next two years. The State Board of Education subsequently appointed an executive secretary to handle administrative duties and gave legal status to the Executive Council (comprised of the six unit presidents) as a specific body of the system which should present policy recommendations to the State Board of Education. Such structure remained for the next 11 years.

Francis A. Thomas, president of the College of Mines, explained his view of the situation on July 15, 1932 -- seven months before Brannon's resignation -- in a letter to Dr. A.A. Cleveland, Dean of the School of Education at the State College of Washington in Pullman. He wrote:¹³

Of course, the Chancellor is the "shock-absorber" as far as the general public is concerned. As was the case when Dr. Bryan was in Idaho, there is a good deal of criticism and more or less direct attack at every session of the legislature. This attack, however, does not seem to be directed against the system, in fact that never seems to be mentioned, but against the Chancellor's office as such, on the ground that it is a useless expenditure and that the consolidated board and the several presidents could do just as well without a Chancellor. To my notion, however, a central executive of a wise and experienced type is the absolute sine qua non of the system, but I should hate to be Chancellor.

Therefore, as a whole, I think the Montana plan is a success for Montana.

¹³ Chancellor's Files, 1932

Just as the grounds for attacks against the chancellorship system were similar to those used against the present system, so, too, were the rebuttals to such attacks similar to those used now. Brannon defended the coordinated system by comparing Montana data with that of 12 other Rocky Mountain States much the way Commissioner Pettit has done in the last several years. Referring to a 1928 study by Dr. Charles H. Clapp comparing the states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming, he noted that:¹⁴

Montana ranks eighth in the twelve states considered in maintenance expenditures from state revenues for teaching in institutions of education. Montana's expenditures represent 5.5 percent of the total for twelve states, whereas she has seven percent of the population and approximately eight and one-half percent of the resources. . .

Expenditures from state revenues for teaching in institutions of higher education amount to \$1.23 per capita of population as compared with \$1.83 in twelve states.

Also evident during Brannon's employment -- and Elliott's as well -- was the argument that faculty salaries should be increased to retain qualified instructors. The argument was to be used for almost 50 years of Montana higher education. It originated in the early twenties when many employed in the system realized that the one and one-half mill levy was not substantial enough to provide adequate support of the four institutions. Uniform salary hikes were not common in those days. Increases were based primarily on merit. The four presidents, in a letter to the State Board of Education on September 19, 1922, wrote:¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Board of Education Minutes, September, 1922, Page 950

Well trained, professional specialists of first class ability are in urgent demand by industry and other colleges and are not willing to make any considerable financial sacrifice in order to teach in the University of Montana especially if their salary warrants cannot be cashed for 100 cents on the dollar. Under the conditions it will be exceedingly difficult to hold first class teachers or to attract others to fill the places of those who go elsewhere. This process is already at work and during the past year the University has lost sixteen of its best teachers to other colleges and to professional work. If this process is continued the University will rapidly become the refuge for professional incompetents, and such persons should not be the directors of the intelligent youth of the State.

Chancellor Elliott, prior to his resignation, also set the tone for the future in a letter to the Board of Education:¹⁶

The State of Montana has never raised enough money adequately to support its state institutions and governmental departments. The present large and unfortunate deficits are the result of twenty-five years of neglect by legislatures of fundamental economic policy in the conduct of the affairs of the state. I am convinced, beyond any doubt that the necessary revenue for the solvency, the self-respect and the progress of the government of the State can never be raised by the present archaic tax system . . . I am satisfied that until Montana devises and accepts some form of personal income tax there can be no permanent solution of the intricate problem of providing funds with which to meet the expenses for doing those things without which the state cannot do, and chief among these things is the University.

Such were the problems inherited by Dr. Brannon. When he attempted to rectify the situation by resigning after ten and one-half years as Chancellor, he ended a dream realized twenty years earlier.

III. THIRTY YEARS OF STUDY

Dr. Henry H. Swain, a long-time employee in the Chancellor's office, was appointed by the State Board of Education as executive secretary of the system upon Brannon's resignation. His function was closely related to that of a clearing house. Another term used for the newly developed position was that of "caretaker".

It wasn't until 1940 that the State Board of Education, legislators, and others realized that a strong central administrator was again needed, among other things, to help coordinate the system mill-levy campaign. In 1920 and 1930, mill levies had been approved only through the diligent efforts of the Chancellors. Subsequent to the rising support of the chancellorship system, Dr. Ernest O. Melby, President of Montana State University in Missoula, was elected Chancellor April 13, 1943. He took leave from that institution and was granted the privilege to resume his presidential post should he so desire.

It was during Melby's tenure that the first major study of the Montana system of higher education was undertaken. A Commission on Higher Education was appointed in January, 1944 by the State Board of Education for the purpose of "making a study of our system of higher education, to search for methods by which it can be made better to serve all Montana citizens, and to make recommendations accordingly."

Interestingly, many of the findings in the 1944 study were reflected later in the 1958 study by University of Utah Vice President E. Homer Durham and in the 1973 recommendations of the Commission on Postsecondary Education. (It should be noted that each successive study was more comprehensive than the previous efforts).

Following is a listing of some similarities:

COORDINATION

1944 CONCLUSION NUMBER ONE

That the six units of our university must be considered for all purposes as one university. By that we mean that the several units must be welded together, not only for the purpose of carrying on one educational program, but the budgetary control and administration as well, must be unified.

1958

Build on the past experience and status quo toward a more effective coordinated system, by strengthening the position of the Board, and the central office of the Executive Secretary, already created by law. This is the most logical, the most practical, and the politically feasible approach to future organizations, and the one finally adopted after hundreds of interviews, much study and discussion, for this study.

1973

RECOMMENDATION 22

The Regents should assume exclusive authority over all matters of internal governance of the University System including internal allocations of funds and establishment and termination of programs and units.

ELIMINATION OF DUPLICATION (PROGRAM REVIEW)

1944

CONCLUSION NUMBER SIX

We recommend that less essential courses now existing in the university be eliminated, as well as unnecessary duplication; and that the expense thus saved be applied toward the procurement of quality teachers and better equipment.

1958

PAGE 89

1. The Board should take immediate steps to delegate to the Executive Secretary the duties outlined in R.C.M., 75-405, especially,

- a. ' to prevent unnecessary duplications of courses of instruction. . . '

1973

RECOMMENDATION 35

The Board of Regents and the Board of Public Education, should establish schedules whereby all programs under their respective jurisdiction are systematically reviewed. An explicit determination regarding continuance, modification or termination should be reached at least once every five years for university and four-year college programs. . .

BUDGETING (UNIFORM ACCOUNTING)

1944
CONCLUSION NUMBER FOUR

We recommend that prior to the meeting of the legislative assembly, the executive head of the state system of higher education, acting with the executive board of each unit, prepare a budget covering a period of two years. . .

"When the budget for each unit shall have been completed, then the executive head of the state system of higher education shall embody all of them into one general budget and present the same to the State Board of Education.

1958
PAGE 79

Central to the importance of future financing is procedure in budgeting. The matter of available reports, feed-back, data and information, exchange among the institutions and through the Office of the Executive Secretary to the board -- all these elements will find a place in making the proper allocation of funds in the future. . .

The future effective financing of higher education in Montana, in final analysis, rests on successfully implementing successful organization for the coordination and control of the six units of the system.

1973
RECOMMENDATION 59

The units of the Montana University System should use a uniform system of accounts as prescribed by the American Council on Education and endorsed by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

There were, of course, other similarities in the three studies; for instance, the development of a planning mechanism for long-range building programs on the campuses. In the final analysis, the wording varied, but the intent was always the same -- a strong central office was needed to help coordinate and govern the six separated institutions.

Many of the recommendations of the 1944 Commission took second seat to controversy surrounding Melby's activities. Melby chose to resign as Chancellor July 1, 1944 and resumed the presidency at the State University

in Missoula. The Board subsequently appointed Melby as executive officer for the Board of Education to report any suggestion made by the Executive Council. This gave some reason to believe that Melby would favor the University of Montana over the other units. One year later the 1945 legislature passed HB 214 which stated that "No person who is president of an institution can serve as executive officer of the Board." Dr. Melby resigned shortly thereafter and Ms. Dorothy Green, a long time employee in the Chancellor's office, was appointed Executive Secretary.

Melby's short-lived reign as Chancellor did not help boost the state's support of a centralized form of administration. He had accomplished little in his employment. Once again controversy had thwarted the dream of 1913.

One of the members of the 1944 Commission perhaps best voiced the frustration of the times -- frustration similar to that exhibited since the turn of the century. J.P. Fabrick, President of the North American Company in Bozeman, wrote Melby on April 25, 1944:¹⁷

The history of the birth and location of the six units of the Greater University is probably very similar to that experienced in many other sections of the nation, but the fact remains that regional and political pressure have had their influence, and the results obtained may readily be an inducement for continued regional and political pressure, in which local pride and profit may easily overshadow true consideration for educational needs and values. This ever present danger may possibly be reduced or eliminated by granting enlarged supervisory powers to the State Board and correspondingly reducing the authority of the legislature. The public should learn to frown upon allowing the Greater University and its management to become political campaign subjects.

¹⁷ Chancellor's Files, 1944-45

Beyond the political problems, it is also evident that the system was still beleaguered with financial problems. Fabrick continued:¹⁸

It has been clearly demonstrated that in order to maintain a level of higher education in Montana comparable with that of the majority of adjoining states (and we certainly cannot offer our young people anything short of that), we will have to pay salaries comparable with those paid in other states. Unless we are prepared to do this, good teachers will go elsewhere at higher pay, and the many new vacancies (some permanent) will ultimately demoralize the entire teaching function of the Greater University.

The end was near for the chancellorship system in Montana. Another Chancellor, Dr. George A. Selke, was appointed in 1946. He also accomplished little and, in 1950, was involved in a controversy over a \$5,000,000 bond issue for University buildings. Friction developed between Selke and Northern Montana College's President Vande Bogart. The Board terminated Vande Bogart's contract April 10, 1950. Seven months later Selke resigned and, five months later the position of Chancellor was abolished by the legislature. For the next twenty years the system would have an executive secretary structure, similar to the one developed in 1933.

Ironically, even though the executive secretary form of organization was less powerful than the chancellorship system, verbal intentions of uniformity were kept alive until the present organizational structure was incorporated in the 1972 Montana constitution. Executive Secretary Alfred J. Dubbe, in a speech September 27, 1962, said:¹⁹

"Almost from the very start, I have been in this effort to coordinate the System and I think we have come a long way. We can't in a few short years resolve everything, but we can get all of the units of the System on the same track."

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Executive Secretary's Files, 1960-63

Dubbe advocated program review and a uniform system of accounting.

IV. THE FUTURE?

It is clear, in light of historical accounts, that most people feel some form of coordination for the six units of the Montana University System is essential. It is also certain, however, that political interests, financial unrest, and other controversy has significantly hindered the original intent of a coordinated system as set forth 63 years ago. No longer can it be said that the future of the System is in the hands of time. Many believe that the time is up!

Since the implementation of a centralized system in 1913, costs of higher education in Montana have increased substantially. And, although the total System's annual and/or biennial budget has increased, the percentage of funding for the central office has remained constant. For instance, the total budget for the System (excluding self-sustaining programs) in fiscal year 1924-25 was about \$1.2 million, while the budget for the central office was \$17,000; the Chancellor's office budget represented about 1.4 percent of the total System's budget. In 1976-77, the Commissioner's office administrative budget is \$622,741, while the total System budget is \$63 million; the Commissioner's budget represents about 1 percent of the total System's budget.

The cost for the "executive secretary" was significantly less than that of the earlier Chancellor primarily because the executive secretary had fewer duties and less authority. In many instances, Montana has been willing to sacrifice coordination ostensibly in an effort to economize. But periodically the need for a strong leader has emerged and the System was restructured. Unfortunately, the Chancellor or Commissioner has always been forced to patch up the damage caused by years of virtual inactivity

before attending to present problems and needed changes. It is impossible to determine how much money has been wasted due to indecisiveness concerning the organizational structure of the System. We can assume, however, that there has been some waste. This is ironic since the original intent of a coordinated structure was to eliminate wastage of public funds and duplication of programs within the system.

Even at its origin, the System concept was to be bandied about by outside interests. A Chancellor, for instance, was not hired until 1916 because the Board of Education was concerned about the proposals' critics -- political and non-political. Prior to the 1913 legislation, in fact, a group apparently representing campus interests at Bozeman tried to snuff out the effort, but were unsuccessful. The Board attempted to eliminate unwarranted problems with the coordination structure following the passage of the legislation in a resolution in June 1914. Their message amounted to a non-binding gag-order for persons within the System. It read in part:²⁰

This board is convinced that turmoil, agitation, and intemperate discussion of public questions is inimical to the well-being, growth and success of the various educational institutions of this state. And this board views with disfavor the idea of conducting any campaign on any public matter pending before the people. . . within said institution. . . either for or against any pending public matter, in such a manner as to interfere with the accomplishment of the established aims and purposes of any institution in the State of Montana, or to the exclusion or interference with the performance or duties contemplated or work included in a given course.

The resolution, was, perhaps, the most direct attempt to quell discontent in the System's history.

²⁰ Board of Education Files, Miscellaneous

Ironically, many of the states which followed suit in the development of a centralized system of higher education are now prospering with their adaptations. One such state, Oregon, served as an example in Durham's 1958 report. Oregon had also struggled both financially and administratively during the depression as was indicated in a letter from Crumbaker to Brannon in the early thirties:²¹

The faculty is much interested and there seems to be a feeling that careful weighing of the relative positions of the State College and University should be made. At the present time the Chancellor is the sole point of contact between the Board of Higher Education and the institutions. There is no executive council, no representation of the various institutions as under your system. Just how the matter will be worked out is at present uncertain.

Twenty-five years later Durham suggests that the Montana system -- operating with an executive secretary -- should take a careful look at the Oregon scheme of unification and coordination. He writes:²²

The Oregon scheme of higher education has a centralized accounting control system, located in its campuses, principally at Corvallis. The legislature should consider the desirability of authorizing the Board of Education to permit the Executive Secretary's office to establish such a centralized accounting and control system of the University, rather than in the Controller's office. . . .

It would not be beneficial to pin the blame on various segments of Montana society for the past failures of the Chancellor system. No one person or group is responsible for its progress or lack of progress. The task in front of the Montana University System is to develop and maintain a public interest, systemwide perspective, serving the legitimate needs of

²¹ Chancellor Files, 1930-33

²² G. Homer Durham, The Administration of Higher Education in Montana (Montana, 1958), p. 93

all campuses, but not acquiescing in the costly special pleadings of any campus. The potential detours are infinite.

The means for progress are far greater today than they ever have been in the past 82 years of state-supported higher education in Montana. A centralized mechanism for program review is available for the first time. Fiscal and management accountability will be available for the first time. Legal resources are at a zenith. More than thirty inter-unit committees, reporting to the Commissioner, overshadow previous chancellorships which provided only minimum cooperative opportunities for the campuses.

In the final analysis centralized authority in higher education throughout the nation always conducts its business with one very crucial strike against it: A system level executive office, unlike its constituent institutions, has no alumni from which to draw support, and no community is economically dependent on its continued existence. That may once again undermine coordination in the Montana University System if those who do not always get their way are able to turn to the political arena and succeed in turning back the clock to the days of six autonomous campuses, each going its own way, protected by the political power of its community or region.

Montana higher education's historical inability to separate politics and personality squabbles from the efforts of improving and promoting quality education sets an ominous context. Should such a pattern continue, reform in Montana higher education may never be achieved.

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